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SUBJECT: Helmand's Agriculture Department's Dysfunction Inhibits COIN

¶11. (SBU) Summary: Demonstrating that provincial government can deliver needed services is the cornerstone of the counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan. In Helmand, given the importance of agriculture, improving Helmand's Department of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (DAIL) is our best available opportunity to reach the maximum number of Afghans with information and services that will tangibly improve people's livelihoods. Despite this tremendous opportunity, Helmand's DAIL is corrupt and dysfunctional. The USG Inter-Agency Civ-Mil Agriculture Team on the ground in Helmand is dedicated to increasing the capacity of Helmand's DAIL. However, achieving a functioning DAIL requires commitment from the Kabul-based Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) to appoint better officials, support district-based staff and place greater emphasis on service delivery to farmers.

History of Corrupt Leadership Undermines COIN

¶12. (SBU) Corruption investigations and dismissals at Helmand's DAIL entrench local mistrust of DAIL and GIRoA. The acting Director of the Helmand DAIL was arrested on November 3 by the National Directorate of Security (NDS) on charges of corruption related to a UK-funded wheat seed distribution program. This comes less than six months after the long-serving previous Director was dismissed under suspicion of selling MAIL-owned land for personal profit. In this environment, DAIL civil servants, historically trained to work in a highly centralized organization, are left without leadership and cannot effectively execute their responsibilities. Signaling the importance of agriculture in Helmand, an acting Director was named within a week of the arrest of the previous director by the Governor. This paperwork has been sent to Kabul for the Ministry's approval.

Lack of District Presence

¶13. (SBU) All Helmand districts have funded and staffed civil service positions for district-based DAIL employees; however, in a recent USDA survey, all but one district reported no DAIL employees living or working in the district. Nearly all of Helmand's district DAIL staff live and work in Lashkar Gah, the provincial capital, and claim that significant security issues make living and working in the districts impossible. In reality, according to Helmand Governor Mangal, employees use security as an excuse to, "sit in Lashkar Gah, drink tea and collect their salaries." The USG Inter-Agency Civ-Mil Agriculture Team in Helmand facilitated the return of DAIL employees to the recently cleared Nawa and Khanashin districts, but this was unfortunately a short-lived win, as these extension workers returned to Lashkar Gah after short periods. In Nar-e-Saraj district, which includes the Helmand's key commercial city of Gereshk, DAIL maintains Helmand's sole district office, with six employees. Unfortunately, these employees deliver few (if any) Afghan government programs to farmers.

Low Salaries, but Little Left for Services

¶4. (SBU) Poor budget management and low pay severely restrict Helmand DAIL's ability to deliver GIRoA programming and services. During the last Afghan budget year, HelmandQs DAIL spent \$25,000, only 7% of its budget, on goods and services for agriculture producers and spent 93% of its budget on salaries. During a USAID-facilitated DAIL employee shura held in August, employees asked "why should they be expected to drive out to districts when DAIL couldn't even reimburse the cost of using personal transportation for on-farm extension work?" Helmand's DAIL salaries are paid on the national pay scale, despite the higher cost of living in Helmand and inherent risk to government workers in this volatile province. Extension workers salaries average \$100-\$150 per month, while day laborers earn around \$150 per month, and seasonal poppy harvesting work pays up to \$10-\$15 per day.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: Helmand's DAIL has U.S. and international partners and programs that are collaborating at the national, provincial and district level. Helmand's DAIL, in its current form, is not currently a reliable partner for U.S. efforts to improve agricultural production in Helmand, and persistently demonstrates weak and ineffective government to all of Helmand's population. Critically, DAIL's failings are most apparent to farmers in the districts, the very population for which GIRoA is competing with the insurgency. USG agriculture programming, therefore, must work with whatever community-based governance bodies are available, including District Councils and Community Development Councils. With basic personnel changes and some initiative from the Ministry in Kabul - especially with respect to appointments, pay, and mandating district presence - this situation could be reversed. Incentivizing existing DAIL district staff to return to districts, with either a pay increase or danger pay supplement, increased program funding for extension and delivery programs, and appointing effective leaders should be priorities for the Ministry in Kabul. The USG Inter-Agency Agriculture Team waits with an open hand of partnership for the Helmand DAIL, but the initiative to take the next step now resides in the Kabul Ministry's hands.

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